The perfect marker -ess in Korean

This paper aims to provide an analysis of the Korean suffix '-ess', traditionally considered as a past marker, as a **perfect** marker yielding either *existential past* or *result state* readings.

(1) Sue-ka ecey/cikum khep-ul kkay-ess-ta.
    Paul-TOP yesterday/now cup-ACC break-PFCT-DEC
    “Sue broke/has broken a/the cup yesterday/now.” *[The cup is broken now]*

(2) Sue-ka ecey/*cikum wuntongcang-eyse nol-ass-ta.
    Sue-NOM yesterday/now playground-LOC play-PFCT-DEC
    “Sue played on the playground yesterday/*now.”

We argue that '-ess' is a spatiotemporal predicate with the meaning of *after* in the sense of Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria(D&U; 2007) and the distribution of its temporal readings is determined by the **telicity** of the predicate to which it is attached:

i. with **atelic** predicates, it yields an *existential past* reading in simple clauses — e.g. (2) where the described event must be construed as having occurred prior to utterance time(UT-T) — and a *past-shifted* reading in subordinate clauses.

ii. with **telic** predicates, it yields a *result state* reading in simple clauses — e.g. (1) where the described event also occurred prior to UT-T but yields a result state that must still hold at UT-T — and a *simultaneous* (or double-access) reading in subordinate clauses.

To account for the available readings of '-ess', we adopt D&U’s temporal syntax for perfect aspect in (4), where Tense/T° and Aspect/Asp° are spatiotemporal ordering predicates projecting their time denoting arguments in the syntax. T° orders the time argument in its specifier, its external argument, the UT-T in matrix clauses, relative to the time argument in its immediate scope, the assertion-time(AST-T; Klein(1995)). Asp° then orders its external argument(AST-T) relative to the event-time. The VP in (4) is assigned a complex event structure consisting of 2 subevents: process and result-state. Each subevent projects the time argument defining its running time: Process-Time(PROC-T), Result state-Time(RS-T). Present in (4) orders the UT-T within the AST-T. Perfect then orders the AST-T after the time in its immediate scope — that is, after the process-time of the VP.

(4) Tense orders UT-T **within** AST-T

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Aspect orders AST-T **after** PROC-T

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Perfect ‘-ess’, however, differs from the English Present Perfect (PP) in one crucial respect: while telic predicates in English allow an *existential* or a *result state* reading of the perfect, telic predicates in Korean only allow a result state reading, as the ungrammaticality of (5b) with the adverbial ‘before’ shows.

(5) a. English PP:
    Paul has broken his computer **before**(existential)/**now**(result state).

b. Korean perfect -ess:
    Sue-ka **cikum/*cene** yulican-ul kkye-ss-ta.
    Sue-NOM now/before cup-ACC break-PFCT-DEC
    “Sue has broken a cup now/*before.” [The cup is broken at **UT-T**.]

We argue that this contrast follows from the proposal that perfect ‘-ess’ orders the AST-T *immediately after* the interval defining the process-time ---while, in English, on D&U’s analysis of the PP, perfect merely orders the AST-T *after* the PROC-T, and thus can focus any time after the interval defining the PROC-T including a time falling after the RS-T of the VP.

When ‘-ess’ orders the AST-T *immediately after* the interval defining the process-time of an atelic predicate, as shown in (6), an existential past reading is generated: the process of playing is construed as past-shifted relative to UT-T, the external argument of T° in a matrix clause.

(6) Sue **play+ess**.

When ‘-ess’ orders the AST-T *immediately after* the interval defining the process-time of a telic predicate ---thus focusing its result state--- a result state reading is generated, as shown in (7).

(7) Sue **break+ess** a cup.

**References**
